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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

THE MEMORY OF THE RIGHTEOUS DEAD.

A SERMON,

PREACHED, JANUARY 11, 1846,

AT THE

NEW GRAVEL-PIT CHAPEL, HACKNEY,

On Occasion of the Death

OF

THE REV. ROBERT ASPLAND.

BY

THOMAS MADGE,

MINISTER OF ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

LONDON:

CHAPMAN, BROTHERS, NEWGATE STREET.

1846.

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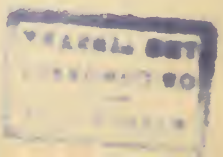

HR 14 Se 37

TO

THE WIDOW AND FAMILY,

AND TO THE CONGREGATION,

OF HIS

DEPARTED FRIEND,

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THEIR FRIEND AND SERVANT,

THOMAS MADGE.

HIGHBURY GRANGE,
FEB. 2, 1846.

LATELY PUBLISHED,

BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS DISCOURSE,

IN ONE VOL. 8VO,

LECTURES

ON CERTAIN HIGH-CHURCH PRINCIPLES

COMMONLY DESIGNATED BY THE TERM

PUSEYISM.

SERMON.

The occasion on which I now rise to address you,—of great and solemn interest to all,—excites in my own mind thoughts and feelings to which I find it difficult to give adequate and appropriate expression. Most willingly would I have declined the task which lies before me, could I have done so consistently with the regard which is due to the wishes of living friends, or with the estimation in which I hold the character, the services, the memory of him who is gone. The place where I now stand is in my mind so associated with the image of your departed Minister—of our beloved friend—with the expression of his animated countenance—with the tones of his living voice,—that I can scarcely realize to myself the conviction that here you will see his face no more; that never again will you hear from him those words of truth and soberness to which you have, doubtless, often listened with delighted, and, I trust, with profitable

attention. For the bereavement over which we mourn, and which will spread so wide and deep a sorrow—especially among that religious community of which he was a distinguished ornament—we were none of us, perhaps, altogether unprepared. He had been so long laid aside from active service, and, from the nature of his protracted illness, so little hope was entertained of any substantial or durable amendment, that no other result than that which *has* happened could reasonably have been anticipated. Though, on our own account, we might have wished to retain him a little longer in the land of the living; yet, when we consider what life had become to him, what a burthen of weakness and suffering it had laid upon him, we may readily believe that for him "to die was gain," and that the event which has touched our hearts with grief has been wisely and mercifully ordained. Let us bow, then, in humble and dutiful submission to the will of God, assured that that Will is always best. This is the lesson which must often have dropped from the lips of your venerated Pastor, and it is one which, if his departed spirit could now address you, he would, I believe, have been most anxious to impress upon your minds. Still, prepared for it as we may have been, and satisfied that the present dispensation is a dispensation of mercy,—that God does not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men,—still, I say, we cannot throw off the feelings of our humanity. Come when it will, death is, at

all times, to the heart of surviving love and friendship, a painful and melancholy visitant. To hang over the lifeless remains of those in whose active kind offices we have long shared—to call upon him who has counselled and comforted us, and to know that we call in vain—to see those eyes for ever closed in darkness which were wont to open upon us in light and in love—to press the cold hand, and to feel no pressure in return—to witness in the friend we have honoured and loved, this sad, mysterious transformation,—is, undoubtedly, of human trials, one of the greatest and severest. But even in the midst of afflictions like this, we have not been left comfortless and without hope. There is a voice that whispers, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto him;" and the virtuous and the good shall meet again. With this blessed assurance, sorrow warms into the glow of piety; and though the pang of separation may still be felt, we shall be consoled in our grief by that powerful and beautiful word which has gone forth and declared to the pilgrims of earth, that there is reserved for them in heaven an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

The passage of Scripture which I have selected as not unsuitable to the present occasion, and from which I propose to draw such further reflections as may, I trust, minister to you moral benefit and spiritual consolation, is taken from

HEBREWS xiii. 7:

Remember them who had the rule over you, (who presided over you,) who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

The writer of these words seems to have been aware of the kindly and virtuous influence which the remembrance of the wise and good is calculated to exercise over the human heart. Addressing the Jewish believers, he calls to their recollection those excellent and distinguished men who had laboured to instruct them in the doctrines of the gospel, and to lead them into the ways of truth and righteousness. He reminds them of the privileges and advantages which they had thus enjoyed, and of the duties and obligations thereby entailed upon them. He appeals to their best feelings and affections, and exhorts them to keep in grateful and affectionate veneration and regard the memory of their illustrious teachers. He beseeches them not to forget their pure doctrine, their holy faith, their virtuous conversation, their fortitude and courage in the profession of the truth, and their zealous, disinterested exertions for its promotion in the world.

And why was such an exhortation addressed to them? Why were they thus invited to meditate on those who had gone before them? Not, we may venture to say, for the purpose of burning incense to the fame of the dead, of heaping vain and unprofitable honours upon the dust of their graves; but for the sake of those pure thoughts and vir-

tuous feelings which such a habit is fitted to inspire. On this account the words of the text are as applicable to us as they were to the first disciples. Be they, then, considered as spoken to ourselves. And in asking us to remember those who have been our guides and instructors, who have shewn to us the way of salvation—in urging us sometimes to think with tender and affectionate interest of the sacred and pleasant intercourse and communion which we have enjoyed with them, and to bear upon our minds a faithful image of their labours of love,—in preferring such a request as this, no unreasonable demand is made upon our time and attention,—none with which a grateful and well-disposed mind will not be willing and prompt to comply.

As mortal beings, we need often to be reminded of our mortality. As thoughtless, unreflecting creatures, absorbed in the things of time and sense, we require to be awakened from our moral slumbers, and aroused to a sense of our duty and our destination. And as mourners in this valley of tears, afflicted and broken in spirit, and weeping for those who are not, we want to have our minds and hearts opened to the thoughts and the hopes and the comforts of heaven, and to know and feel that there is a blessing attendant upon the memory of the righteous dead.

If it be true that he who walketh with the wise shall be wise, it is scarcely less true that he who walketh with the good shall be good. It is hardly

possible to live and breathe in the same atmosphere with a really virtuous man, without being, in some measure, infected with his principles and imbued with his tastes. We cannot be too thankful for every such instance of acquaintance and companionship which it has been allowed us to enjoy. It is one of the most powerful human instruments which Providence has put into our hands for attaching us to virtuous pursuits, and saving us from the degradations and debasements of vice. I cannot wish better for you, my brethren, and for those who are dear to you, than that it may be your and their lot to have for your associates the pure, the merciful, and the just. Every such connection you will find to be a fresh link in the chain which binds you to duty and to God. Our characters depend so much upon the circumstances in which we are placed, upon the impressions to which we are commonly exposed, upon the thoughts and images and expressions with which we are most familiarized, upon the associations which we form, and the counsels and encouragements which we are in the habit of receiving, that we cannot be too careful as it respects both the society into which we ourselves enter, and that to which we introduce our children. It is an object of greater importance than we are apt to imagine. In fact, it is of the greatest importance to our moral well-being. Our minds take their colour and complexion very much from the minds with which they hold communion. He who

is in the habit of associating with the bad, insensibly acquires something of the impurity adhering to their character. He cannot come away from their society totally untainted and unpolluted. Nor can he, I repeat, who associates much with the good, retire from their intercourse without being, in some degree, the better for it. It may give a direction to his pursuits, an elevation to his views, a purity to his principles, and a dignity to his conduct, which but for this he might never have attained. Seek, then, for yourselves, and for those committed to your care, virtuous and honourable associates, and be assured that in obtaining these you are obtaining a treasure above all price, a treasure which you will learn to value more and more the longer you live, and which, when you come to die, you will be glad to bequeath as a precious legacy to those whom you leave behind.

When they to whom our hearts have been knit in the bonds of love and friendship are taken from us, we feel that there goes with them much of the pleasantness and the beauty of our life on earth. But Providence has designed that such events as these should be productive of something better than unavailing, fruitless lamentation. The very sorrow, indeed, which is then felt, has a tendency to soften the heart, and to prepare it for receiving deeper the seeds of piety and truth. Then is the time when the cares of the world are, for a while, forgotten; when its absorbing interests are, for a moment, un-

thought of; when even its pleasures cease to please, and its noise and tumult are hushed into quiet and peace. Then it is that we are most disposed to listen to the voice of Religion, to commune with her spirit, to attend to her claims, to implore her aid, to seek her consolations, and to yield ourselves to her guidance and direction. This is one of the benefits more immediately resulting from the remembrance of those who have departed hence in the Lord. But sorrow is mostly short-lived, and nothing therefore which is dependent upon that can be reckoned lasting and secure. The remembrance of the virtuous dead, however, sometimes remains fresh and strong when the sorrow which was felt at their departure from us has subsided into the calmness and composure of resignation and submission. Then, indeed, a blessing attends it which is both great and enduring. The recollection of their good deeds, of their active and disinterested kindness, of the purity of their principles and the firmness of their integrity,—the recollection of all that they have said and done for the cause of truth and justice, of their benevolent wishes and holy purposes and pious endeavours, cannot come frequently over the soul without leaving behind it something of a kindred and congenial nature. They are gone—but their good name and the remembrance of their virtues yet remain. The sun of their human life is set, in this world to rise no more; but, besides that we may look forward to a time when it shall re-appear and shine in a nobler

sphere, it has even now kindled in the hearts of many a survivor a light which shall never be extinguished, a light which will continue to shed upon them its warm and benignant influence, cherishing all their better purposes and stimulating and invigorating all their virtuous exertions. Such, too, is the constitution of our minds, that in thinking of the wise and good who have been taken from us, we can scarcely recollect or think of any thing that is not itself good. The little frailties and imperfections which may have been attached to them on earth, fall away from them as they put off the garment of mortality. It may be said, indeed, that they never really formed any part of themselves. They never were substantially incorporated with their souls. They had gathered around them in the course of time, as gathers the ivy around the oak on which it grows; but, as in that case so in this, they were never essentially blended together; and now that we can contemplate them out of the body, apart from those adjuncts and appendages with which they were, for a while, connected, and with which, perhaps, we had here too closely identified them; now that we can survey them through a purer and brighter medium than that which formerly surrounded them, we see them as having been, substantially and intrinsically, even on earth what we shall find them to be when we meet with them in heaven. So that in dwelling on the memory of the virtuous dead, we are not only led to form a juster estimate of the real

worth of their character, but by recalling to our remembrance their good qualities, disjoined and separated from those little blemishes which may have entwined about them here, we see more perfectly into the true nature and character of Virtue; her graces and her excellencies are more fully and clearly revealed, and present still higher and stronger claims upon our admiration and our love.

There is no consideration more soothing to the grief of sorrowing friends than the thought, that they for whom they mourn have acted their part in life faithfully and well; that they have done what they could; and that if there be another state after this, as we believe and are assured there is, their condition in that state cannot, for a moment, be doubtful. It is, indeed, a sweet reflection,—the value and comfort of which it is hardly possible to express in words,—when we can say to ourselves, Our friend is taken from us, but he died in peace and sleeps in Jesus, and his spirit rests in hope. He has descended to the grave clothed with the virtues of a Christian, after having, through life, constantly endeavoured to walk humbly with God and honestly before men. This, in conjunction with the gospel assurance of God's pardoning mercy, is a foundation upon which we may venture to build a fabric of high and glorious expectations. Knowing what the character of the departed has been; having witnessed his spotless integrity, and his pure and unaffected piety; having observed in the whole

tenour of his life that devotedness to duty which is the best test of a heart right with God,—it is not too much, when we stand by the grave of such a friend, to anticipate for him, in the future world, all that is blissful and happy. And so we read in Scripture, "Blessed are they who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." The memory of the just thus becomes associated with the rewards of virtue in heaven. It reminds us of what we ourselves are to be, when this earthly house of our tabernacle is dissolved, and we have entered into our rest. It brings before our minds the glorious vision of futurity, and instead of fixing our attention upon the darkness and silence of the tomb, it points to mansions in the sky, to that "land of holy and pure delight, where saints immortal dwell." While our friends are with us on earth, we may, perhaps, wish for them a thousand other things besides piety and virtue; but when this world is no more to them, we feel that all else is as nothing and vanity; and that if they possessed these, they possessed every thing,—every thing necessary to their real and enduring happiness. At such a time, what on their account will it avail us to know that they were rich or powerful, great or prosperous, if they have not been wise and good? Destitute of these moral qualities, there will be wanting in the composition of their characters the only ingredient which can make us think of them with complacency and satisfaction,—the only

ingredient which can give us comfort and peace in the retrospect of the past. Let the parent wish for his child honour and reputation and worldly advancement; for these, within the bounds of moderation, he may lawfully strive; but let him not think that these, in themselves considered, are enough; that these alone can compensate for the absence of the higher attributes of our being. If he do, the time may come when he will bitterly deplore the error of his calculation, and remember—too late, alas! for his own happiness—that it is the wise, the good, the virtuous child who alone maketh a glad father.

We live in a world where the objects of sense are ever pressing upon us, dividing our cares and distracting our attention, and where we are continually tempted to forget that here we have no continuing city, but are only pilgrims and strangers, as all our fathers were. Now the remembrance of the virtuous dead tends very much to dispel this delusion, and gently reminds us that this is not our home; that our real citizenship is in heaven; and that the time will soon come when, with us also, the silver cord shall be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken; when the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it.

In addition to these remarks, let me observe once more, that the remembrance of the society and the charities which we have enjoyed on earth, is one very efficacious means, in the order of Providence,

of preparing us for the society and the charities to be enjoyed in heaven. When we think of all the bright days and the pleasant, cheerful hours which we have spent in the company of our departed friends —when we reflect upon all that we have thought and felt and hoped and feared in common—when we call to mind all the sweet interchanges of kindness and sympathy that have passed between us,— we cannot but earnestly wish and pray that this interchange and fellowship may hereafter be accorded to us again. And blessed be God for the assurance which he has given us, through Jesus Christ, that so it will be, if we are followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. Do you ask, What is the path that has led them to honour and to happiness? We answer, it is the path of religion and piety; and peaceful and beautiful as that path always is, it presents itself to us as more peaceful and beautiful still, because it is the path which has been trodden by them. All our best desires, all our natural sympathies, all our strongest, dearest affections, thus become engaged and enlisted on the side of virtue. It is not required of us that we should wean our thoughts or withdraw our cares from the objects immediately around us, and which may deservedly claim some portion of our regard; but finding, by experience, upon what a frail and tottering foundation all our attachments in this world rest—looking only to this world—it behoves us to strive to raise our thoughts above the earth,

and to build our hopes in heaven, knowing that there we shall reap the best fruits of our love if, in the mean time, we continue patient in well-doing. It is a great mistake to suppose that the remembrance of the virtuous dead tends to make us think less, or with less regard, of our living friends. It rather inclines us to value and love them more. As the circle contracts, we are naturally drawn closer together. And moreover, when the shades of our departed friends pass before our minds, we are apt to revert, at the same time, to all those instances in which we have been, in any way, harsh or unkind or ungrateful to them. We mourn over the error of which we have thus been guilty, and we vow in our hearts never again to inflict upon ourselves so painful and bitter a recollection. Hence we are led to watch with greater care, and to cherish with tenderer affection, the friends who are yet spared to us. The memory of the just, therefore, is calculated to make us kinder as well as purer. Our minds, from reflecting upon those we have lost, return with a warmer interest to the consideration of those that remain.

In these general observations on the advantages and blessings to be derived from virtuous remembrances, you have, no doubt, as I went along, adverted in your minds to *him* whose labours here, so long and faithfully dedicated to your service, are now closed for ever. Many and great as may be the benefits commonly resulting from the direction

of your thoughts in the way of which I have now been speaking, they must be greatly enhanced when your attention is turned towards those who were not only your friends and associates, but your counsellors and instructors in the things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. In addition, then, to the reasons already mentioned, there are especial grounds, in the present instance, why you should cherish the remembrance of him who is gone. He stood to you in one of the most interesting and important relations that one human being can sustain towards another. He was your pastor, your minister or servant in Christ. From him you were long accustomed to receive those lessons of heavenly wisdom which he drew from the treasury of the revealed word. From sabbath to sabbath he met you here, guiding your devotions, raising your thoughts from man to God and from time to eternity, opening to your view the way of salvation, and beseeching you to walk therein, that so you might find rest to your souls. Here he stood, week after week, for a period of many years, to speak to you and to reason with you of righteousness and judgement and a world to come. Here, from time to time and as occasion required, he not only warned every man and taught every man in all wisdom, but spoke to the hearts of the sorrowful and the dejected, of the contrite and the penitent, of the weary and heavy laden, those words of peace and comfort and hope of which they severally stood in need.

To one with whom you were thus accustomed to assemble in the house of prayer and to meditate on mortality and immortality, who expounded to you with singular force and clearness the oracles of God, and imparted to you of his own spiritual wealth, there must be attached feelings of no common interest. I will not believe that you can call to mind what he once was, that you can think of him as you have here seen him in all the vigour of life and the plenitude of his intellectual power, earnestly and eloquently pleading the cause of truth and righteousness, and making your hearts vibrate to the tones which he uttered,—I cannot believe that such recollections can be brought vividly before you without some meltings of human sorrow that all this is for ever passed away, and the silent utterance of a blessing upon the memory of so able and faithful a minister in the Lord.

But emotions like these are not all that is required of you. Something more must be added to them, if you would fulfill the injunction contained in the text, and turn the present dispensation of Divine Providence to the uses for which it is designed, and which it is both your wisdom and your duty to endeavour to draw from it. You are not only to remember, then, the personal qualities, the talents and the virtues of those who have presided over you in the church of Christ, but you are to remember their counsels and admonitions, the object and end of their ministrations, the faith which they

inculcated and the duties which they enforced. You must recall to your minds, and impress deeply upon your hearts, the valuable instructions, the solemn warnings, the urgent entreaties, the affectionate supplications, that were addressed to you to persuade you to walk worthy of the vocation to which you have been called,—worthy of the glorious destination to which you aspire. Fruitless sympathies, mere passing regrets, will do no honour to the memory of the departed, and no good to your own souls. Your sorrow for what is lost, your remembrance of those who are gone, will only tell to your greater condemnation, if they lead to no practical result. To be serviceable to yourselves; to be useful to others; to constitute a fitting tribute to the virtues of the dead, or a grateful offering to the affections of the living, they must flow into your lives, to purify and elevate them; they must dwell in your hearts, to cleanse and sanctify them. Without some such homage as this, your outward ceremonial of respect will be but a vain show. I do not say to you, remember not him who in this place so long presided over you—it would be discreditable to you if you did not—but I say, remember more than all, and above all, the words of truth which he has here spoken to you; bring back the pure thoughts and the holy desires which his living voice inspired into you; carry out the good purposes and the virtuous resolutions which he may have awakened in your breasts; and take into the cham-

bers of your souls those great Christian principles whose claims upon your regard and reverence he so often and so powerfully set before you, and which, if they be thus received and cherished, will be to you as the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, to guide you safely through the pilgrimage of earth, and to bring you at last to the green pastures and still waters of eternal life. Let these be the fruits of his labours among you, and you will then fulfill his own warmest wishes on your behalf,—wishes which I cannot deny myself the gratification of expressing, and you the advantage of hearing, in his own words.

"Though my exertions," says he, in the Dedication prefixed to the volume of Sermons which has long been in your hands, and which will now possess a double interest in your eyes—"Though my exertions have always fallen so far short of my wishes and purposes, as to cause me to feel the duty of deep humility before the throne of Divine Grace, I cannot forego the pleasing hope that, through the blessing of Him on whom every thing on earth and in heaven depends, I have not laboured in vain." So be it according to his prayer, and you will then have reason indeed to rise up and pronounce his memory blessed.

But the sphere of his usefulness, the field of his exertions, extended over a larger space and embraced a wider circle than lies within these walls, or is bounded by this congregation. Here, however, was

the principal scene of his labours; and to your religious improvement, to your moral and spiritual benefit, to the instruction of your minds in the knowledge and apprehension of divine things, and the solace of your hearts with Christian consolations, his thoughts in private and his energies in public were mainly devoted. But yet he found time and strength to give his cares and to exert his powers whenever they were called for—and often were they called for—by the friends of truth and freedom, of justice and humanity. On all occasions he was ready to fight the good fight of faith—to contend earnestly for the truth which he believed to have been once delivered to the saints. In every struggle for human rights, and above all for the rights of conscience, he was first and foremost; and it is not too much to say, that the successful issue of some of those struggles was, in no small degree, attributable to the wisdom of his advice, the force of his eloquence, the indomitable firmness of his courage, and the untiring patience of his perseverance.

For the welfare of our particular religious community,—for the interests of that cause which, in his mind, was closely identified with the pure gospel of Christ, he felt the deepest concern, and was ever ready to labour, both in season and out of season. When I consider the services for which, at different periods of his life, we, as a section of the Christian Church, are indebted to him; when I reflect upon the zeal which he often displayed in behalf of our

distinguishing principles, the perspicuity with which he stated and illustrated them, and the vigour with which he repelled the attacks of unjust assailants,* —I feel that, in losing him, we have lost one of our best and ablest advocates, and whose place it will not be easy to supply. No wonder, then, that by so many among us his removal is mourned and lamented. How often, and in how many ways, we shall miss him, it is hardly necessary for me to observe. That he *will* be missed—that we shall be perpetually reminded of his absence—that we shall often feel the want of that energy and quickness of intellect which enabled him, with almost intuitive sagacity, to perceive what was fit and proper for the occasion, and to meet any emergency that might arise, in the best manner and with the best appliances,—no one who has observed him in public debate, or seen him engaged in the business of our various charities and trusts, can for a moment doubt. He had at all times an entire command of all his powers. His judgement, his tact, his insight into the real nature of the matter under consideration, never failed him. His resources seemed to be al-

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* I allude here more particularly to the Letter of Expostulation addressed by him to the Rev. H. H. Norris, entitled, "A Plea for Unitarian Dissenters"—an admirable publication, which displays, in no ordinary degree, the qualities of sound judgement, nice discrimination, an intimate knowledge of the subjects discussed, and a gentlemanly courtesy towards an opponent who, for the violence of his invectives and the uncharitableness of his temper, deserved even a severer chastisement than he received.

ways within reach—always available for the purpose required—always ready to answer his demands. His promptness in replying to objections, in surmounting difficulties, in shaping his course of action to the exigencies of the moment, has often excited my admiration and astonishment. How can it be, then, but that every where, in all our institutions and associations, where he was accustomed to take so active and leading a part,—how can it be but that the want of his guidance and help will be long and severely felt?

At no time, perhaps, have we, as a religious body, stood more in need of the aid of his judgement and talents than at the present moment. Amidst the opposition from without which we have to encounter,—the bitter prejudices, the ignorant misconceptions, and sometimes, I fear, the wilful misrepresentations arrayed against us,—we have now, within our own borders, evils and difficulties of another and a different kind to deal with. There is a party among us—bearing our name at least—I trust a very small party—who advocate principles which seem to me to be subversive of the very foundations of our Christian faith. I confess, my brethren, that I understand not the Christianity which is disrobed of its miraculous vesture. A gospel without the sanction of divine authority, without the impress of a supernatural origin, unencircled by the radiance of a celestial light, without the glory of the resurrection, without the triumph of the ascension, with-

out the descent of the Comforter, would be no gospel to me; would, to my mind, be no longer the bearer of glad tidings of great joy. For what is the highest human wisdom, when compared with the wisdom that cometh from above? What are the brightest inspirations of human genius, when compared with those which come down upon us direct from the Majesty on high? How is it possible that Christianity can be considered as having the same claims upon our attention and regard, can impose upon us the same obligations, can demand from us the same allegiance, or give us the same assurance that its promises will be fulfilled and its purposes accomplished, whether we view it as the offspring of human wisdom—of human wisdom, say, in its loftiest elevation—or whether we consider it as a direct emanation from God's holy spirit? I avail myself of this solemn occasion strongly to protest against the justice, against the propriety, of placing under the same denomination, and of calling by the same name, parties differing so entirely and fundamentally as to the authoritative character of the Christian religion. The difference is as wide as the poles asunder between the faith of him who sits at the feet of Christ, listening with reverential attention to the words which fall from his lips, because he believes them to have been, in the main, dictated by the mind of God, and therefore demanding unquestioning acquiescence and unresisting submission—and the faith of him who looks up to Christ

as among the wisest of human teachers, but still as belonging to the same class or order of men as Socrates or Plato, invested with no higher authority, and entitled to no more implicit obedience. Take from Christianity that divine sanction and testimony which miracles alone can impart, and it is like taking the jewel from the casket, the soul from the body.*

In the views and feelings which I have now expressed, I believe I should have had the entire sympathy and the cordial concurrence of our revered friend; and I am thus made still more sensible of the loss which we have sustained when I consider how his powerful mind might have helped to detect and expose the unsoundness of the fore-mentioned theory—to tear away the mystic veil under which this mischievous delusion has been nurtured into existence. Hence I am led to observe, that your

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* Touching this subject, I am glad to be able to quote the following impressive language of Dr. Dewey, of New York: "Look into the New Testament and see what is there. Is not miracle spread over it, interwoven with it, every where? I confess that I cannot reason at length a matter so very plain. There lies the book. If any man can tear miracle from the face of it, without mutilation and destruction of the whole record—without making the book ridiculous, the writers of it impostors, and the religion a foolish legend, he must possess an ingenuity which, I think, has never yet been brought to bear upon the subject. Miracle is there, clear and indisputable—veritable miracle—open and public—often repeated—often distinctly appealed to by our Saviour in support of his claims—constantly attested by eye-witnesses, and by the very eye-witnesses on whose fidelity and sobriety our faith in the religion reposes—and, I repeat it, inextricably interwoven with the very texture of the narrative, with the entire fabric of the system."

departed Minister received for himself, and instructed you to receive, the religion of Christ as strictly and properly a divine revelation—not as a system of man's invention; a fabric raised by the application of human ingenuity, or the efforts of human reason; but as a scheme devised in the counsels of heaven, and sent down to earth stamped with the name and authority of God. Jesus, the bearer of this communication, the organ of his Father's will, was therefore regarded by him as truly his Master, whose teachings are to be reverently listened to, and whose directions are to be carefully followed. To him, Christ was the wisdom of God and the power of God—the discloser of secrets which that wisdom only could unveil,—the performer of wonders which that power alone could effect. Thus his faith was a faith in the word of God, and not in the reasonings or intuitions of man. That word it was his earnest desire and endeavour rightly to understand, as well for the sake of his own guidance and comfort, as for the guidance and comfort of those committed to his charge. With the result of this study you, my brethren, are well acquainted. You know that, contrary to the bias first impressed upon his mind, contrary to the opinions in the belief of which he was brought up, he, like many of his illustrious predecessors, was led, by a diligent and serious examination of the Scriptures, to the firm persuasion that, in all its essential features, Unitarian Christianity bears the nearest resemblance to the original gospel

of Christ of any system now existing on earth. To the inculcation and promotion of this, his adopted faith, he henceforth devoted himself with great earnestness and ardour; and if, in his younger days, that ardour ever led him to any display of undue warmth of manner or intemperateness of expression, he had certainly long since outgrown this tendency; and though, to the last, he valued and loved that form of Christianity which we profess,—and chiefly because to him it was *the* Christianity of Christ and his apostles, the image of its brightness and the mirror of its glory,—though, to the end of his days, he remained firmly attached to our peculiar views of the gospel, he delighted, nevertheless, to dwell on those great truths and facts which are common to the faith of all Christians, and by which all Christians are or should be linked together in the bonds of a common brotherhood.

Having said thus much in reference to the more public portion of your revered Minister's life, I shall abstain from going into the details of his personal history, and the more so, because it is rendered unnecessary by what has been already delivered to you from this place.* Nor shall I now speak of him as he was in his own home—of the blank that has been there created—of the void that must there be felt. God have mercy upon its inmates, and shed down upon them the dew of his blessing, the calm

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* In the Funeral Address of the Rev. Dr. Rees.

of meek and humble resignation to His will! May they who inherit his name remember, as I am sure they will, that it is an honoured name; that they are bound to preserve its honour; to take care that by no act of theirs shall it suffer any degradation; and that they will transmit it, as they have received it, pure and untarnished. And may you, the members of this congregation, who so long enjoyed the advantage of his valuable instructions,—may we, his associates and friends, so often gladdened by his society and converse,—may all of us now present, whatever has been our relation to him, learn the lesson of so tuning our minds to angelic harmonies, to the song of the Lamb that is sung before the throne of God, that, when the appointed time cometh, we may be fitted and ready to join in the heavenly concert. May we ponder well the things which belong to our everlasting peace, before they are finally hidden from our eyes. May we endeavour to do the work of duty now, knowing that the night cometh when no man can work. May we bear in mind that if we wish—and what soul is so dead, what heart is so cold, as not to wish?—to join again the friends we have loved and honoured here, we must lose no time in dressing our souls for the society of the blessed. If, when we drop the coil of mortality, we would be clothed upon with immortality, we must put on the armour of God and gird ourselves with the sword of the spirit now. Whatever be the scene or state of being for which we are

destined, no happiness can be derived from that state unless we have previously brought our minds into something like an accordance and harmony with it. If we are to be raised from earth to heaven, heaven must first, to a certain extent, be brought down to earth. The elements of true happiness are the same in both worlds, and to reap the fruits of the spirit hereafter, we must cultivate the fruits of the spirit now. It is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." But if God has prepared these things for us, it is our part to prepare ourselves for them. Be prepared, then, to meet your God by doing those things which you know will be pleasing and acceptable in His sight. Be prepared with those pure thoughts, with those strong principles of duty, with that active faith and with that enlightened piety, which will make your lives useful and honourable, and your deaths peaceful and happy.

My friends and fellow-christians, one word more, and I have done. How fast are we following, one after another, to that bourn whence no traveller returneth! How many of those with whom we were wont to take sweet counsel and rejoice in their companionship, are now assembled in the world of spirits! Where our treasures are, there should our hearts be also. They cannot come again to us, but we shall go to them. How soon, is known only to

Him who hath the times and the seasons in His own power. The summons of our departure may even now have gone forth. The angel of death may now be on his way to mark us for his own. But whether early or late, in the morning, noon or evening of life, the event is equally certain, and demands from us the same preparation. Meanwhile, let us comfort ourselves with the assurance that the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and that He will keep the sacred deposit which is committed to Him until that day, when the bondage of the grave shall be broken, and death shall be swallowed up in victory.

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THE MEMORY OF THE RIGHTEOUS DEAD.

A SERMON,

PREACHED, JANUARY 11, 1846,

AT THE

NEW GRAVEL-PIT CHAPEL, HACKNEY,

On Occasion of the Death

OF

THE REV. ROBERT ASPLAND.

BY

THOMAS MADGE,

MINISTER OF ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN, BROTHERS, NEWGATE STREET.

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